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Painted by Washington Allston.

Saul and The Witch of Endor.

Engraved by C.E. Wagnstaff & J. Andrews.

Engraved by Washington Allston.

In a scene of dramatic interest, the New England Art Union, in the City of Boston, has the honor to announce that it has purchased the painting of the Witch of Endor, by the artist Washington Allston.

BULLETIN
OF THE
NEW ENGLAND ART UNION.



NUMBER 1.

THE Directors of the New England Art Union have much pleasure in laying before the subscribers the accompanying sketch of *Mr. Allston's Witch of Endor*, in anticipation of the distribution of the engraving. They feel confident that, in the selection of this work for their first distribution, they shall be regarded as having made a valuable contribution toward the culture of American Art. It would be superfluous to dwell upon the merits of Mr. Allston as a great, original genius, whose pure and lofty talent was cultivated by years devoted to the study of the best works of the best schools, and especially by his own severe and self-criticising discipline. While as countrymen the directors of the New England Art Union are justly proud of his fame; as friends of American Art they have felt it their first official duty to do something to extend the knowledge and influence of his works. It may be considered quite certain that, without the agency of this or some similar institution, no adequate engraving of the *Witch of Endor* would, for a long time, have been submitted to the public. The Directors avail themselves accordingly of the first suitable opportunity which has presented itself, to return their public acknowledgments to the proprietor of the painting, Hon. Thomas H. Perkins, for liberally granting the use of it for so long a time as is necessary for the execution of a first class engraving.

They have also considered it as quite important, in reference to the higher influence of Art in America, to select for distribution a work which is calculated to elevate and purify, rather than to startle by dramatic incongruities, or amuse with scenes of low life. In this way, painting, like poetry, may be made the instrument of raising the tone of public sentiment. It is by no means the wish of the Directors to refer the productions of art to an austere standard. But every one must feel the preference to which a work of high classic character is entitled, with regard to its effect on the public taste, and through the taste on the moral sentiments, over works which appeal to no higher principle of our nature than the sense of the ludicrous. The relation between the two departments of art is pretty nearly the same as between the "gorgeous tragedy," and the farce which follows it; one "purifies the soul with pity and terror," the other shakes the sides with laughter.

The selection of a work of Mr. Allston, for their annual distribution, falls in with the main object of the New England Art Union, which is to encourage American Art in its present struggle into life, in our own age and country. It is not enough considered that until the friends of art unite in this endeavor, little is accomplished toward its improvement. The admiration of the works of the great masters of the sixteenth century, though a pure and elevated, is comparatively a barren sentiment. The productions of these masters are, nearly all of them, in the galleries and cabinets of Europe, locked up from the general eye

even there, and, of course, with the exception of a few travellers, secluded from American observation. Chance alone throws some doubtful work of this class into the hands of an American purchaser, by whom, in turn, it is of necessity withdrawn from public observation. Surely art cannot be expected to thrive in a country where the mass, even of cultivated individuals, have but very few opportunities of contemplating the finest specimens.

When the American amateur traveller goes a step further than the study of the works which he finds in the European galleries, and attempts to do something to promote or gratify a taste for art at home, he is too apt to resort to the purchase of what is to be had from the dealers; showy pictures, with high sounding names; sometimes modestly professing to be only of the *school* of Raphael or Titian; sometimes, still more modestly, to be "*dei tempi*." Paintings of this kind, which compose the great majority of those brought from Europe to America, are for the most part of no artistic value; never the product of the great masters to whom they are ascribed; often destitute of the characteristics of the school to which they are pedantically referred; even the age is frequently apocryphal. Modern paintings are easily made to assume the cracks and the crust of centuries; and when painted on old pannels or old canvass, the illusion, as far as age goes, is complete. Few pictures of this description can be considered as standing higher than articles of furniture. They divide the honors of the drawing-room with rich mirrors and luxurious carpets. Their introduction into the country can do but little for American Art. Even if their artistic merit was as great as their want of it, the beneficial influence upon the art of our own country would be but indirect.

For reasons of this kind, even in Europe, where so many more opportunities exist for the purchase of works of the great masters, and where so many possess the amplest means to gratify their taste in this way, some very enlightened patrons of art have confined themselves on principle to the acquisition of choice works of modern, and, if possible, living masters. Such was the course pursued by the great sculptor Thorwaldsen. For the liberal purpose of encouraging the professors of a kindred art, he formed an extensive gallery of pictures, the production of living painters. One or two liberal patrons of art in England, possessed of fortunes which would enable them to acquire the gems of all the cabinets of the continent, as they find their way from year to year, to London, prefer purchasing the best works annually exhibited at the Royal Academy. Let this course be pursued for an adequate period in this country, and a new and auspicious era would dawn upon American Art.

EDWARD EVERETT.

MR. ALLSTON'S PAINTING OF SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

Shakspeare's Macbeth, in the witches' cave, is brought strongly to mind by this strange episode in the history of Saul. Both the men were kings. Both had fallen into a change of fortune and perplexity of mind, and were "sore distressed." Both resorted to supernatural and unholy arts, that they might read their fate in the events that were to come. But here the parallel ends. The Scottish king had usurped the throne by murder, and was maintaining it by every cruelty. The first Jewish sovereign, on the contrary, was anointed by a prophet and elected by the people, the champion and not the oppressor of his nation; and so modest was he, that he endeavored to hide his tall head

when they persisted in setting the crown upon it. The former, in seeking the weird sisters, would know his destiny from those who had first spurred his ambition and predicted his greatness. The latter was driven by his anxiety to have recourse to those "consulters with familiar spirits," whom he had himself banished out of the land.

Biblical scholars have given different interpretations of the scene here presented. According to the views of some, nothing out of the usual course of nature was intended to be described. The Witch of Endor was a mere pretender to magical powers; and all that took place was a deception practised upon the terrified imagination of Saul, and the easy credulity that had brought him to her secret retreat. She was a ventriloquist and a necromancer, as Josephus describes her to have been. She could hardly have failed, they say, to recognize the king of Israel under his disguise by his extraordinary stature. She could have borne no good will to him. The darkness of the night and his own troubled spirit were favorable to her purposes; and there needed no gift of prophecy to foretell the loss of the impending battle, when the heart of the leader was already overcome. They think that the very letter of the account bears them out in this supposition; for the sacred historian tells us that the king asked of the woman what she saw, and what form the divine figure was of, which she declared she saw rising out of the earth. He perceived that it was Samuel only through her representation, and at once stooped with his face to the ground. Upon this conception of the story, no vision of the departed seer was actually presented, and the denunciatory voice was that of the woman herself. We confess that we have no great admiration for criticisms and conjectures of this sort. The learned world had altogether too much of them, fifty years ago and more, from a class of commentators who aimed to naturalize all the miraculous accounts of holy writ. This school was rather a mean one; with many a forced construction and many a childish conceit, and quite undiscerning of the true spirit of those ancient narratives, which it often tormented with an easy ingenuity. Though in the present instance its application is more plausible than usual, we cannot help thinking that it tries to be more knowing than is possible for it to be. In common with most attempts of a similar kind, it seems to commit the mistake, so frequently made, of confounding what one supposes to be the real fact,—which is one thing,—with what the scripture writer means to set forth as the fact,—which is quite another. But however this may be, it is plain that such a conception of the subject now under consideration cannot possibly admit of any pictorial effect. It cannot be made poetical or artistic. If you should exhibit it on the canvas, it would show nothing nobler than a cowering man, with his head buried out of sight, while a cunning hag was playing her coarse tricks with him. We are almost tempted to say, that the meanness of such an idea should banish it from biblical criticism as completely as it excludes it from the domain of taste and feeling, and the painter's magic skill.

Another set of speculators, who would be wise above what is written, imagine that our witch had an accomplice, who enacted the part of the ghost and threatened the issue of the next day's conflict. This would evidently make the matter worse, and turn what was before a tragi-comedy into broad farce. It may well seem singular, that they who undertake to explain the Bible, that most imaginative of books, which represents the

widest mysteries of truth by fables and symbols, by material shapes and within graphical outlines, should so often be unskilled in the philosophy of beauty; so deficient in that æsthetical perception, which is scarcely less important to a proper appreciation of the writings of antiquity, than to the correct judgment of works of art. Improperities of figurative speech are sometimes best exposed by transferring them to an imaginary canvas. In like manner, perhaps, now and then, might incongruous and over-curious criticisms of ancient records be exposed.

Mr. Westall seems to have adopted a third supposition, in his delineation of the same scene. The shade of the dead prophet is actually there; but the witch stands aghast at the result of her own incantations, as if the apparition had nothing to do with the exercise of any power that she possessed. This idea corresponds sufficiently with the language of the account: "And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice; and the king said unto her, 'Be not afraid.'" We must admit that the account itself does not enter into any minuteness of detail; but, on the contrary, is so rapidly sketched as to give opportunity for several conjectures, if any one is disposed to raise them.

Mr. Allston has conceived the subject in its most obvious meaning, in its most striking aspect, and handled it like a great artist. It is a scene of gloom and awe. A lamp is burning in a distant corner, but faintly and without any illuminating power. A supernatural light gleams from the thin phantom who has risen within the charmed circle, and after falling upon the principal figures is lost amidst deep masses of shadow. The two terrified attendants of the king are dimly descried towards the back-ground on the right; one of them endeavoring to effect his escape from the dreadful cavern. The enchantress, with outstretched arm and pointing fingers, fixes upon Saul her stern and sorrowful looks. The monarch himself is an image of dismay. He is ready to faint, though roused for the moment to an intense life. The sword has fallen sheathed from his relaxed grasp. His eye is dilated with horror. You see that those strong limbs will soon fail under him. All this is worthy of the poetical genius that planned it. It was right to represent the woman as a strong and terrible being, and not as the withered creature that a less original hand would have depicted. It was right to show the stately chief still upon his feet, not yet prostrated either by his reverence or his despair. In one point, however, the artist may be charged with having deviated from the scripture story. This tells us that the royal captain "disguised himself and put on other raiment," when he visited the sorceress. And yet in this picture he is clad like a warrior and a prince, and a circlet of gems is seen glistening among the locks of his hair. Doubtless an advantage is thus gained for the exhibition of the painter's skill, and the power of the piece is thereby greatly increased. We would not have had the king of Israel muffled up in his mantle, as Westall has drawn him, any more than we would have had him fallen upon his face, as he appears in that artist's design. We are willing to allow a great deal of latitude in order to the production of a dramatic effect. We go so far as to admit, that such an effect is better worth attending to than a close adherence to the historical letter. And yet if some indication had been given of an attempted concealment of the person of the noble visiter, though it were only the folds of a rustic cloak, that had dropped from his shoulders in the agitation of the moment, we are not sure that we should not

have liked it better. The slightest mark would have been sufficient to point out that part of the story; a part that was worth the telling, and which no one could have contrived better than Mr. Allston how to tell, without interfering with his grand idea of presenting in full lineaments the tall son of Kish. Perhaps, however, even this remark is hypercritical. We know that Art has always claimed to take liberties, and sometimes very large ones, with historical truth. We remember how the pictures of legendary Rome pile up magnificent architecture, for an age when few buildings were better than huts; and how the French school, of half a century back, set forth the heroes of the Classical Epics, for the sake of displaying flesh tints and a knowledge of anatomy, engaged in the most sanguinary battles with an alarming scantiness of clothing of any sort. Certainly the departure from fact in the present instance is extremely inconsiderable, by the side of such examples. Indeed, it scarcely needed to be mentioned, but for the desire that one naturally feels to find complete perfection in every part of so admirable a design.

The few reflections, now ventured upon, relate only to the subject and the general treatment of Mr. Allston's picture. We leave it to some other and better trained hand, to describe the particular merits of its execution.

N. L. FROTHINGHAM.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF WASHINGTON ALLSTON.

The brief sketch of the life of Mr. Allston, which we give to the readers of the Bulletin, has been taken, by permission, from his recently published "Lectures on Art." They are a most valuable contribution to the Literature of Art, and should be in the hands of every amateur, and all who desire to have true views of Art, and to establish correct principles of criticism. The few lectures he completed are so admirable, that one deeply regrets that his valuable life had not been prolonged to have enabled him to finish what was so well begun. The volume also contains his "Poems" on various subjects; the first edition of which has not been long out of print.

I will not anticipate the duty of the biographer by an extended notice of the life of Mr. Allston; but it may be interesting to some readers to know the outline of his life.

WASHINGTON ALLSTON was born at Charleston, in South Carolina, on the 5th of November, 1779, of a family distinguished in the history of that state and of the country, being a branch of a family of the baronet rank in the titled commonalty of England. Like most young men of the south in his position of that period, he was sent to New England to receive his school and college education. His school days were passed at Newport, in Rhode Island, under the charge of Mr. Robert Rogers. He entered Harvard College in 1796, and graduated in 1800. While at school and college, he developed in a marked manner a love of nature, music, poetry, and painting. Endowed with senses capable of the nicest perceptions, and with a mental and moral constitution which tended always, with the certainty of a physical law, to the beautiful, the pure, and the sublime, he led what many might call an ideal life. Yet was he far from being a recluse, or from being disposed to an excess of introversion. On the contrary, he was a popular, high-spirited youth, almost passionately fond of society, maintaining an un-

usual number of warm friendships, and unsurpassed by any of the young men of his day in adaptedness to the elegancies and courtesies of the more refined portions of the moving world. Romances of love, knighthood, and heroic deeds, tales of banditti, and stories of supernatural beings, were his chief delight in his early days. Yet his classical attainments were considerable, and, as a scholar in the literature of his own language, his reputation was early established. He delivered a poem on taking his degree, which was much admired in its day.

On leaving college, he returned to South Carolina. Having determined to devote his life to the fine arts, he sold, hastily and at a sacrifice, his share of a considerable patrimonial estate, and embarked for London in the autumn of 1801. Immediately upon his arrival, he became a student of the Royal Academy, of which his countryman, West, was president, with whom he formed an intimate and lasting friendship. After three years spent in England, and a shorter stay at Paris, he went to Italy, where he spent four years devoted exclusively to the study of his art. At Rome began his intimacy with Coleridge. Among the many subsequent expressions of his feelings towards this great man, none, perhaps, is more striking than the following extract from one of his letters:—"To no other man do I owe so much, intellectually, as to Mr. Coleridge, with whom I became acquainted in Rome, and who has honored me with his friendship for more than five-and-twenty years. He used to call Rome the silent city; but I never could think of it as such while with him; for, meet him when and where I would, the fountain of his mind was never dry, but, like the far-reaching aqueducts that once supplied this mistress of the world, its living stream seemed specially to flow for every classic ruin over which we wandered. And when I recall some of our walks under the pines of the Villa Borghese, I am almost tempted to dream that I have once listened to Plato in the groves of the Academy." Readers of Coleridge know in what estimation he held the qualities and the friendship of Mr. Allston. Beside Coleridge and West, he numbered among his friends in England, Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb, Sir George Beaumont, Reynolds, and Fuseli.

In 1809, Mr. Allston returned to America, and remained two years in Boston, his adopted home, and there married the sister of Dr. Channing. In 1811, he went again to England, where his reputation as an artist had been completely established. Before his departure, he delivered a poem before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge. During a severe illness, he removed from London to Clifton, at which place he wrote "The Sylphs of the Seasons." In 1813, he made his first, and, with the exception of "Monaldi," twenty-eight years afterwards, his only publication. This was a small volume, entitled "The Sylphs of the Seasons, and other Poems," published in London; and during the same year, republished in Boston under the direction of his friends, Professor Willard of Cambridge and Mr. Edmund T. Dana. This volume was well received, and gave him a place among the first poets of his country. The smaller poems in that edition extend as far as page 289 of the present volume.

Beside the long and serious illness through which he passed, his spirit was destined to suffer a deeper wound by the death of Mrs. Allston, in London, during the same year. These events gave to his mind a more earnest and undivided interest in his spiritual relations, and drew him more closely than ever before